



Ancient Philosophy

Antisthenes' Concept of *Paideia*

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ABSTRACT: Antisthenes of Athens was an older student of Socrates who had previously studied under the Sophists. His philosophical legacy also influenced Cynic and early Stoic thought. Consequently, he has left us an interesting theory of *paideia* (reading, writing, and the arts) followed by an even more brief one in divine *paideia*, the latter consisting of learning how to grasp the tenets of reason in order to complete virtue. Once properly grasped, the pupil will never lose it since it is embedded in the heart with true belief. However, there is a danger of being confused by human learning, which may delay or obviate completing divine *paideia*. Nonetheless, with the help of a teacher who gives a personal example, like Socrates or the mythical Centaur Chiron, the pupil has a chance of reaching his or her goal. Through a series of myths, Antisthenes gives us the foundations of his logical and ethical theory together. Reasoning is both a way to grasp virtue and also to fortify it. Although he would have chafed under a modern university educational system, we may learn from him to value concise philosophical studies as a necessary adjunct to basic lessons in liberal arts.

Antisthenes of Athens (445-360 B.C.) is remembered for being one of Socrates' older pupils. (1) In fact, he was old enough to have first studied under the sophists, before he met Socrates. (2) He thus stands straddling three important periods in the history of Greek philosophy. As a 5th century philosopher, he copied the rhetoric of Gorgias in his famous *Ajax* and *Odysseus* speeches and like the sophists, believed that virtue was teachable; surviving into the 4th century, he was taken seriously by Plato and Aristotle, composing essays in which he propounded an individual logical theory of his own; (3) and as precursor of Hellenistic Cynicism, he composed dialogues, teaching new ethical and social norms that resurfaced after his death in the teaching of Diogenes of Sinope and the Stoa. (4) In this paper, I would like to examine some aspects of Antisthenes' educational theory and his concept of *paideia*.

In at least one of his lost Hercules dialogues, Antisthenes seems to have described Hercules' visit to the Centaur Chiron and subsequently to the Titan Prometheus. (5) Both these episodes ascribe to Hercules a different type of *paideia*. The first episode is often connected with a the mythological theme of Chiron's school, where the just Centaur was said to have taught heroes and demi-gods various branches of *paideia*:

"From him (scil., Chiron), Asclepius was said to have learned medicine, Achilles — the lute, and Hercules astronomical literature." (6)

We should note even at this stage that these branches of *paideia* are by no means reflected Hellenistic and Roman educational programmes. Medicine in particular is an anomaly. Furthermore, there is evidence that this description goes back to Antisthenes himself. A late scholiast adds to the above quotation:

"Hercules enjoyed his (scil., Chiron's) hospitality, as said Antisthenes" (7)

He thus shows that at least part of this Chiron episode was examined by Antisthenes in his *Hercules* dialogues even if not all the details of the main evidence is certain.

The testimony for this whole episode is encompassed in a complex astronomical tradition explaining the mythological figures in the constellations of the sky. (8) What emerges is that Chiron as depicted as a just Centaur, teaching a form of *paideia* that encompassed various human sciences (medicine, music and astronomy). However, external evidence also makes it clear that Antisthenes made Hercules an example to prove that toil (*ponos*) was a good thing (Caizzi, fr. 19). It is in this context, that he discussed the wise man and the concept of virtue as teachable (*didakte*; fr. 23, 69). It would then have been natural for Antisthenes to have extended this examination and depicted "the just" Chiron as educating the heroes (fr. 28). Having arrived at his school, Hercules was said to have obeyed Chiron as long as he submitted to the Centaur's tutelage. Antisthenes' remark on the way in which Achilles served Chiron, though but a beast (*therion*), for education's sake (Caizzi, fr. 28) seems to reflect Pindar's description of Chiron, the wild beast (*pher*), who taught the heroes (*Py.*, iii. 4 ff., iv. 119). What he then depicts here is an image of a rustic school, where heroes of potential but still unachieved virtue, forgo their self-pride and return to nature. At this stage, *paideia* is still not philosophical — the subjects studied belonging to normal human culture and science — medicine, music and astrology — and the reason for the hero's quest is said to be initially inspired more by *eros* for the young Achilles than the *logos* of Chiron (fr. 25-26).

However, in the second surviving episode of this dialogue, Hercules is upbraided by the Titan Prometheus for forsaking his quest and seeking worldly things (fr. 27). In this section, he is advised to think of man's place in the universe:

Prometheus said to (10) Hercules, 'Your toil is very contemptible in that you are occupied with the things (11) of the world for you have abandoned concern for what is greater than (12) this (world). Indeed, you will be no complete man until (13) you learn those things that are more exalted than humans. But if you learn (14) these things, then you shall learn of human things too. However, if (15) you learn only of what is here, you will wander like the wild beasts'. (16) He then whose diligence is in the things of the world (17) and who has enclosed his mind's reason and prudence (18) in what is weak and narrow, is no wise man, as (19) said Antisthenes, but is like an animal (20) that takes pleasure in a dung-hill » (p. 33, ll. 5-20). (9)

On all accounts, this section would seem to follow the Chiron episode and must indicate the direction in which virtue was meant to be teachable (fr. 23, 69), with Prometheus not as a sophist, but a true philosophical figure, giving instruction on virtue and reasoning. Once more, Antisthenes' sophistic background would seem to have taken a new, Socratic turn: for the serious role given Prometheus in Antisthenes is more akin to his role in Plato's *Protagoras* than to his role as a sophist in Hellenistic literature.

There would then seem to be two mentor figures in Antisthenes' dialogue — and consequently a double concept of *paideia*: a Chiron figure who teaches the rudiments of human, social sciences, and a Prometheus figure who teaches — or at least inspires the hero with the desire to seek virtue by himself. This is partially substantiated by Caizzi's reconstruction of an old fragment with new evidence where those *about to become* good men have to train their bodies with exercises and their souls with *logoi* (fr. 64 & n.).

Elsewhere there is evidence for a slightly different theory of double *paideia*. This consisted in: human education (*anthropinos paideia*) in the basic rudiments of human culture and spiritual education (*daimonios paideia*) in reasoning and virtue. There is good reason to deduce that Prometheus' lessons lay along these lines (10) In the Prometheus fragment, Hercules has to learn that reasoning (*logismos*) was an exalted thing. Elsewhere, Antisthenes is known to have compared virtue to divine reasoning. What Antisthenes must surely mean is that Hercules' previous *paideia* was useless without a necessary foot-hold in basic reasoning, for otherwise he would wander like an "unreasoning beast".

Antisthenes' understanding of reasoning and virtue is that they cannot be confiscated or lost (iv. 32). While Socrates is often depicted as claiming that those who understand what virtue is will do no wrong willingly, Antisthenes seems to have developed his teacher's lesson one step further: those who truly understand *arete* cannot be unconvinced of its worth. He employed two metaphors to describe the state of virtue:

- 1) virtue is like a weapon that cannot be lost (Diog.L., vi. 105);
- 2) virtue is a wall that is steadfast, without breach (Caizzi, fr. 90).

Now the way in which we are meant to construct this unbreachable wall, is not by any lengthily *paideia*, but by a few easy lesson (Diog. L., iv. 29) and no manifold *logoi* (fr. 38). For Antisthenes, a long sophistic *paideia* was not conducive to virtue. Rather the personal example of the teacher was a much shorter and impressive method to teach it. This is why he says that "Virtue is self-sufficient for happiness and needs nothing in addition save for a Socratic strength; virtue is of deeds and has need neither for very many arguments (*logoi pleistoi*) nor lessons". (11) While this Socratic strength would be comparable to the *physis* of Chiron the Centaur, the types of *paideia* taught by either would be different. Socrates' virtue was a moral strength and a true return to nature.

What may we learn from Antisthenes account? He makes a clear distinction between cultural and philosophical education. The former is long and winding with many pit-falls for those who have not yet grasped true reasoning. In many cases, the hero many never reach philosophical *paideia*, never mind attain it. However, having received the bare basics in human *paideia*, he would also be armed against the arguments of the sophists, but, of course, be only properly armed if he had completed his human *paideia* with a philosophical one in reasoning. This reasoning is not meant to be just a crash course in logic. For Antisthenes, logic is a realization of the true meaning of concepts and primarily, that of virtue. In fact, the first and perhaps only lesson, is that virtue is the only good. This was of course expressed without the complicated ethical framework of the later Stoa. It resembled more the simple ethics visualized by Diogenes the Cynic. However, in contrast to Diogenes, Antisthenes did not think of virtue as solely abandoning all physical goods and returning to basic nature. For him, we have to take part in human society and thus be fortified with the basics of human *paideia*. If this were not so, Antisthenes could not have written a *Cyrus* dialogue, where as in his *Hercules* dialogue, he tries to prove that toil is a good thing. Unlike Hercules, however, Cyrus the Prince, could not have been depicted as acting in a purely private capacity. The latter is the case with Hercules, who, in the Prometheus episode, was meant to have continued his journeys in order to benefit mankind. In the *Cyrus* dialogue, however, the hero, Cyrus the Prince, would have had to exercise his virtue in a social, regal sphere rather than in a private, Herculean one. Political involvement of the hero was not one that was particularly dear to the early Cynics, who preferred to non-involvement in politics. In another respect, Diogenes' development of Antisthenes' philosophy would have been markedly different. Diogenes developed a theory of double *paideia* that coupled the fortification of the soul with the fortification of the body. (12) This was a necessity for any Cynic to survive in a physical world, but marked a subtle change in

attitude to virtue itself. This was not a change that Antisthenes would necessarily have approved, nor needed since his philosophy did not demand that he return to a state of nature.

Would Antisthenes find a place today in a modern university? In some ways, he would be happy that there was a superficial liberal arts education — though perhaps three to four years undergraduate study would have seemed to him excessive. He probably would intensely dislike more than a semester in formal logic and complained that it was no longer taught with a virtue in view. Our courses in ethics would probably anger him, in that they spread doubt and skepticism instead of fortifying the soul with a few easy arguments. However, his theory of double education is that one that should be warmly recommended in any university. This comprised a course in general liberal arts followed by a degree in ethical philosophy. Although he would have chafed under a modern university system, we may learn from him to value concise philosophical studies as a necessary adjunct to a basic *paideia* in liberal arts.

Notes

(1) Fragments and testimonies in: G. Giannantoni, *Socraticorum Reliquiae* (henceforth 'Giannantoni, SR'), II (Napoli, 1983) 319-407, III (Napoli, 1985), notes pp. 177-363; F. Decleva Caizzi, *Antisthenis Fragmenta*, Milan-Varese 1966 (henceforth, "Caizzi, fr.").

(2) General background to problems in: H.D. Rankin, *Antisthenes Sokratikos* (Amsterdam, 1986); Goulet-Cazé in *DPhA* (*Dictionnaire des Philosophes Antiques* (ed. R. Goulet), Paris), I (1994), s.v. 'Antisthène'; W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Sophists*, Cambridge, 1971, 304-310.

(3) H.D. Rankin, 'Antisthenes a "Near-logician"?' in: *L'Antiquité Classique* 39 (1970), 522-527; idem, *Antisthenes Sokratikos* (Amsterdam, 1986), 44-45.

(4) On its influence:- M. Luz, "The Transmission of Antisthenes' Hercules in Hellenistic Philosophy and Literature", in: *Hellenistic Philosophy* (ed. C. Boudouris, Athens, 1994), 114-121.

(5) The standard lists of his works speak of two dialogues of this name: *Hercules the Greater, or On Strength* and his *Hercules or On Prudence or Strength* (D.L. vi. 16, 18). These two titles may refer to the same dialogue. On the Prometheus episode, see: M. Luz, 'Antisthenes' Prometheus Myth', in: J. Glucker- A. Laks (eds.), *Jacob Bernays Unphilologue juif = Cahiers de Philologie*, Lille III 16 (Eng.; Villeneuve d'Ascq, 1996), 89-103.

(6) "a quo [scil., Chirone] Aesculapius medicinam, Achilles citharam, in astrologia Hercules litteras didicisse dicantur" (A. Breysig, *Germanici Caesaris Aratea cum Scholiis*, Berlin, 1867, p. 90, 17-19).

(7) "cuius hospitio Hercules usus, sicut Antisthenes dicit." (*schol. Stroziana* — Breysig, *op. cit.*, p. 178, 9-10). On the value of this evidence, see: Luz (1996), 102-103.

(8) Represented by the surviving epitome of Ps-Eratosthenes' *Catastirismi* (cap. 40) and various *Aratea*.

(9) Syriac text, background and commentary in: Luz (1996), 89-103.

(10) See discussion in: Luz (1996), 99-100.

(11) D.L., vi. 11 (Caizzi, fr. 70 & n.) - a "Socratic strength" reminds us of Antisthenes' *Hercules the Greater, or On Strength* and his *Hercules or On Prudence or Strength* (D.L. vi. 16, 18). So also "virtue is of deeds (*erga*)" reminds us of Hercules' *erga* as *arete*. See also Caizzi (*op. cit.* above, n. 2, p. 67) on the *ergon-logos* contrast in Antisthenes.

(12) See the discussion in: R. Höistad, *Cynic Hero, Cynic King* , Uppsala 1948.

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